

MLB proposes limiting free-agent signings to December, February onward

BY RONALD BLUM
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Major League Baseball proposed limiting free-agent signings to several weeks in December and then from early February on each offseason along with a trade ban during the gap in-between, a plan aimed at creating more of an off-season transaction flurry similar to those in the NFL and NBA.

The plan offered to the players' association Thursday is contingent on adoption of the salary cap system MLB proposed in May, which the union has vowed never to accept.

"A cap-and-floor system would unlock additional opportunities to improve the game for players and fans, creating more stability in rosters, getting the best players to the major leagues more quickly, and accelerating the pace of the offseason," MLB spokesman Glen Caplin said in a statement. "In our current economic system, these changes would be too harmful to competitive balance and would not be practical."

Union head Bruce Meyer immediately criticized the plan.

"Their latest proposals regarding free agency would eliminate player rights by establishing an artificial free agency window, subject to a salary cap, which would reduce player leverage and create a game of musical chairs pitting player vs. player," he said in a statement. "The suggestion that the



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Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred attends the Little League Classic baseball game between the Milwaukee Brewers and the Atlanta Braves in Williamsport, Pa., on Sunday.

only way to limit roster churn, or incentivize earlier free agent signings is with a salary cap is entirely unserious."

Management's prior cap proposal led to a 7 1/2-month strike in 1994-95 and the first cancellation of the World Series in 90 years.

Under the current rules, players can become free agents starting the day after the World Series but may not negotiate money terms with new teams until the end of the "quiet period" at 5 p.m. Eastern time on the fifth day after the World Series ends.

MLB proposed extending the quiet period until noon Eastern on the Monday of the winter meetings, usually held in early December. It would allow negotiations during the quiet period but would not permit any contracts to be finalized.

Free agents could sign through 5 p.m. Eastern on Dec. 21 and then wouldn't

be allowed to until noon Eastern on the first Monday in February, just ahead of spring training.

During the period the players are not allowed to sign, there would be a prohibition on trades, similar to the current ban from early August through the end of the postseason.

MLB said the additional time would be needed for revenue and salary cap figures to be finalized ahead of the business season.

MLB proposed to cap spending in 2027 at \$245.3 million, using figures for luxury tax payrolls that include \$20.1 million for benefits and the pre-arbitration bonus pool. It also would establish a payroll floor of \$171.2 million, forcing some teams to

spend more.

Free-agent eligible players would be limited to deals of \$265 million and six years. Under the current rules, outfielder Juan Soto negotiated a record \$765 million, 15-year deal with the New York Mets after the 2024 season.

"MLB expressly conditioned these proposals on the players' agreement to a salary cap system, which would drastically reduce overall player compensation, eliminate fully guaranteed contracts through escrow, and turn back the clock on fundamental player rights," Meyer said of Thursday's plan.

MLB also proposed low-

ering the maximum in-season options to the minor leagues from five to four and adopting a system of weekly rosters. Teams would be allowed 14 pitchers, up from the current limit of 13 when the 26-man roster limit is in effect from the season's start through Aug. 31.

Players have proposed optional assignments be cut to three.

"The league is not interested in any changes that don't directly reduce the rights of all players and shift leverage to the owners," Meyer said.

Teams would be limited to making callups from the minors and demotions to

the period after Sunday's games and before Monday's contests, with exceptions for injured list decisions and moves to replace those who got hurt.

Option and injured list periods would be changed from 10 days to one week for position players and from 15 days to two weeks for pitchers, but those periods would start with the first full week after a player goes on the IL. For instance, a pitcher going on the IL or optioned on a Wednesday would have to spend at least 19 days on the IL: the five remaining days that week plus an additional 14 days.



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